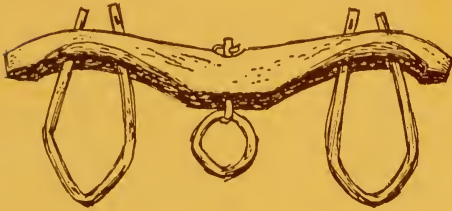


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Jefferson-Lincoln  
Symposium of What  
Constitutes Americanism

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# Jefferson – Lincoln Symposium

of what constitutes

# Americanism



Selected and Arranged by  
LAURIE J. QUINBY



1936

DAVIES PRINTING COMPANY  
Publishers  
225 East Fourth Street  
Los Angeles

HELP TO CIRCULATE  
THIS PAMPHLET

*PRICE—Ten Copies \$1.00*

*Address—Care of Publishers*

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# DEDICATED TO THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



THE DAY has arrived for the American people to rouse themselves to the dangers that threaten. They must go forward under the principles of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, especially as expressed in the Preambles to these two great documents. Next to Washington—who stands alone—the two out-standing Presidents who, in their policies, most exemplified the principles of those two documents, were THOMAS JEFFERSON and ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

Though times may change, and the general course of progress make many turns, true principles that underlie all advancement are based upon natural law and never change. Because the Preambles to the Declaration of Independence and the Federal Constitution state sound principles to continued progress, and for the reason that these two great Presidents demonstrated their eternal truth, proudly we follow the illustrious leadership of THOMAS JEFFERSON and ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

## DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

WE HOLD these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness; that, to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that, whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it, and to institute a new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and experience hath shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing forms to which they are accustomed.

The JEFFERSON—LINCOLN GROUP HEREBY AFFIRMS THAT THOSE PRINCIPLES ANIMATED THE FATHERS WHO FRAMED AND INCORPORATED THEM INTO THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES, and that whatever abuses have crept into the social and economic life of America are due to the violation of those principles. Further, we declare that no form of government devoted to the principles of LIBERTY will ever survive, save through the jealous attention and constant interest of the people. The TREE OF LIBERTY must be watered by the sweat of far-seeing PATRIOTS — jealous of their natural rights.

### PREAMBLE TO THE CONSTITUTION

WE, THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of



Liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

Now, therefore, we, AMERICANS of the JEFFERSON—LINCOLN GROUP hereby re-affirm our devotion and allegiance to every Article and every section and paragraph of that Constitution, including each and several Amendments to it that heretofore have been and hereafter may be duly adopted by the people.

In further recognition of these principles, to a candid people, we submit consideration of the following statements of principles and policies, made by THOMAS JEFFERSON and ABRAHAM LINCOLN:

LINCOLN AT GETTYSBURG: . . . It is for us, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion; that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom; and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

SAID THOMAS JEFFERSON:

The legitimate powers of government extend to such acts only as are injurious to others.

Reason and free inquiry are the only effective agents against error. They are the natural enemies of error and error only.

It is error alone which needs the support of government. Truth can stand by itself.

What has been the effect of coercion? To make one half the world fools, and the other half hypocrites.

(Notes on Virginia.)

The basis of our governments being the opinion of the people, the very first object should be to keep that right. My general aim would be, to make the States one as to every thing connected with foreign nations, and several as to everything purely domestic.

I think it very material to separate, in the hands of Congress, the executive and legislative powers, as the judiciary are, in some degree.

(Letter to Carrington, 1787.)

The Tree of Liberty must be refreshed from time to time, with the blood of patriots and tyrants.

(Letter to Col. Smith, Nov., 1787.)

A man's moral sense must be unusually strong if slavery does not make him a thief.

(Letter to Edw. Bancroft, Jan., '88.)

The accounts of the United States ought to be, and may be made as simple as those of a common farmer, and capable of being understood by common farmers.

(Letter to James Madison, March, 1790.)

I consider the foundation of the Constitution as laid on this ground: that "All powers not delegated to the United States, by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States, or to the people." To take a single step beyond the boundaries thus specifically drawn around the powers of Congress, is to take possession of a boundless field of power, no longer susceptible of any definition.

(On National Banks, February 15, '91.)

Truth between candid minds, can never do harm. We must preserve the liberty we have obtained only by unremitting labors and perils.

(April, 1796.)

. . . whenever the General Government assumes undelegated powers, its acts are unauthoritative, void and of no force: . . . that the government created by this compact was not



made the exclusive or final judge of the extent of the powers delegated to itself; since that would have made its discretion, and not the Constitution, the measure of its powers.  
(November, 1798.)

. . . to take from the States all the powers of self-government and transfer them to a general and consolidated government, without regard to the special delegations and reservations solemnly agreed to in that compact, is not for the peace, happiness and prosperity of the States. . . every State has a natural right in cases not within the compact, to nullify of their own authority all assumptions of power by others within their limits. . . Free government is founded in jealousy, and not in confidence; it is jealousy and not confidence, which prescribes limited constitutions, to bind down those whom we are obliged to trust with power: that our Constitution has accordingly fixed the limits to which, and no further, our confidence may go. . . In questions of power then, let no more be heard of confidence in man, but bind him down from mischief by the chains of the Constitution.  
(November, 1798.)

If there be any among us who would wish to dissolve this Union or to change its republican form, let them stand undisturbed as monuments of the safety with which error of opinion may be tolerated where reason is left free to combat it. I know, indeed, that some honest men fear that a republican government cannot be strong; that this government is not strong enough. But would the honest patriot, in the full tide of successful experiment, abandon a government which has so far kept us free and firm, on the theoretic and visionary fear that this government, the world's best hope, may by possibility want energy to preserve itself? I trust not. I believe this, on the contrary, the strongest government on earth. . . Sometimes it is said that man cannot be trusted with the government of himself. Can he, then, be trusted with the government of others? Or have we found angels in the form of kings to govern him? Let history answer this question.

(First Inaugural, March 4, '01.)

It behooves every man who values liberty of conscience for himself, to resist invasion of it in the case of others, or their case may, by change of circumstances, become his own.  
(April, 1803.)

### Referring to the National Bank:

This institution is one of the most deadly hostility existing, against the principles and form of our Constitution.

Now, while we are strong, it is the greatest duty we owe to the safety of our Constitution, to bring this powerful enemy to a perfect subordination under its authorities.  
(December 13, 1803.)

I may err in my measures, but never shall deflect from the intention to fortify the public liberty by every possible means, and to put it out of the power of the few to riot on the labors of the many. . . . The most effectual (protection of reason and truth) hitherto found, is the freedom of the press.

(June, 1804.)

As yet our manufacturers (workpeople) are as much at their ease, as independent and moral as our agricultural inhabitants, and they will continue so as long as there are vacant lands for them to resort to; because, whenever it shall be attempted by the other classes to reduce them to the minimum of subsistence, they will quit their trades and go to laboring the earth.

(January 4, 1805.)

The earth belongs to the living, not to the dead. The will and power of a man expires with his life, by nature's law. . . . The soil is the gift of God to the living.

(January, 1805.)

### ABRAHAM LINCOLN:

All honor to Jefferson—the man who, in the concrete pressure of a struggle for national independence by a single people, had the coolness, forecast, and sagacity to introduce into a merely revolutionary document an abstract truth, ap-

plicable to all men and all times, and so embalm it there that today and in all coming days it shall be a rebuke and a stumbling block to the very harbingers of reappearing tyranny and oppression.

(Letter written in 1859.)

I have never had a feeling politically, that did not spring from the sentiments embodied in the Declaration of Independence. . . . It was that which gave promise that in due time the weights would be lifted from the shoulders of all men, and that all should have an equal chance. This is the sentiment embodied in the Declaration of Independence.

(February 22, 1862.)

I do not mean to say that we are bound to follow implicitly in whatever our fathers did. To do so would be to discard all the lights of current experience—to reject all progress, all improvement. What I do say is that if we would supplant the opinions and policy of our fathers in any case, we should do so upon evidence so conclusive, and argument so clear, that even their great authority, fairly considered and weighed, cannot stand. . . . Human action can be modified to some extent, but human nature cannot be changed. . . . Let us have faith that right makes might, and in that faith let us to the end dare to do our duty as we understand it.

(Cooper Union, Feb. 27, 1860.)

All the armies of Europe, Asia and Africa combined, with all the treasures of the earth (our own excepted) in their military chest, with a Bonaparte for a commander, could not by force take a drink from the Ohio or make a track on the Blue Ridge in a trial of a thousand years.

At what point, then, is the approach of danger (to our institutions) to be expected? I answer: If it ever reach us it must spring up amongst us; it cannot come from abroad.

If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a nation of freemen we must live through all time, or die by suicide.

(January 27, 1837.)

Many free countries have lost their liberties, and ours may lose hers; but if she shall, be it my proudest plume (boast), not that I was the last to desert, but that I never deserted her.

(December, 1839.)

Speaking of chattel slavery, though the following applies as well today:

I hate it because it deprives our republican example of its just influence in the world, enables the enemies of free institutions with plausibility to taunt us as hypocrites, causes the real friends of freedom to doubt our sincerity, and especially because it forces so many good men amongst ourselves into an open war with the very fundamental principles of civil liberty, criticising the Declaration of Independence, and insisting that there is no right principle of action but self-interest. . . . The doctrine of self-government is right—absolutely and eternally right. . . . when he (man) governs himself and also governs another man, that is more than self-government—that is despotism. . . . what I say is that no man is good enough to govern another man without that other's consent. I say this is the leading principle—the sheet anchor of American republicanism. . . . Let us re-adopt the Declaration of Independence, and with it the practices and policies in harmony with it. . . . let all Americans—let all lovers of liberty everywhere join in the great and good work.

(October 16, 1854.)

That we shall do, Shade of Abraham Lincoln.

On the Declaration of Independence:

I think the authors of that noble instrument intended to include all men, but they did not intend to declare all men equal in all respects. They did not mean to say all men were equal in color, size, intellect, moral developments or social capacity. They defined with tolerable distinctness in what respects they did consider all men equal—equal with “certain unalienable rights, among which are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” Its authors meant it to be—as,



thank God, it is now proving itself—a stumbling block to all those who in after times might seek to turn a free people back into the hateful paths of despotism. They knew the proneness of prosperity to breed tyrants, and they meant when such should re-appear in this fair land and commence their vocation, they should find left for them at least one hard nut to crack.

(August 24, 1855.)

### On the rights of States :

I think I have said it in your hearing, that I believe each individual is naturally entitled to do as he pleases with himself and the fruit of his labor, so far as it in nowise interferes with any other man's rights; that each community, as a State, has a right to do exactly as it pleases with all the concerns within that State that interfere with the right of no other State; and that the general government has no right to interfere with anything other than that general class of things that does concern the whole. . . . That is the electric cord in that Declaration (that all men are created equal) that links the hearts of patriotic and liberty-loving men together; that will link those patriotic hearts as long as the love of freedom exists in the minds of men throughout the world. . . . They (arguments denying that all men are created equal) are the arguments that kings have made for enslaving the people in all ages of the world. You will find that all the arguments in favor of kingcraft were of this class; they always bestrode the necks of the people — not that they wanted to do it — but because the people were better off for being ridden. That is their argument, . . . that says, "You work, and I eat; you toil, and I will enjoy the fruits of it." Turn it whatever way you will—whether it come from the mouth of a king, an excuse for enslaving the people of his country, or from the mouth of men of one race as a reason for enslaving the men of another race — it is the same old serpent.

(July 10, 1858.)

From Lincoln's First Inaugural Address, quoting a plank of the platform on which he was elected:

*Resolved*, That the maintenance inviolate of the rights of the States, and especially the right of each State to order and control its own domestic institutions according to its own judgment exclusively, is essential in that balance of power on which the perfection and endurance of our political fabric depend, and we denounce the lawless invasion by armed force of the soil of any State or territory, no matter under what pretext, as among the greatest of crimes.

\* \* \*

If by the mere force of numbers a majority should deprive a minority of any clearly written Constitutional right, it might, in a moral point of view, justify revolution — certainly would if such a right were a vital one. . . . A majority held in restraint by constitutional checks and limitations, and always changing easily with deliberate changes of popular opinions and sentiments, is the only true sovereign of a free people. Whoever rejects it does, of necessity, fly to anarchy or despotism. Unanimity is impossible, the rule of a minority, as a permanent arrangement, is wholly inadmissible; so that, rejecting the majority principle, anarchy or despotism in some form is all that is left.

### Regarding the Supreme Court:

I do not forget the position assumed by some, that constitutional questions are to be decided by the Supreme Court, nor do I deny that such decisions must be binding, in any case, upon the parties to a suit, while they are also entitled to a very high respect and consideration in all parallel cases by all other departments of government. . . . At the same time, the candid citizen must confess that if the policy of the government, upon vital questions affecting the whole people, is to be irrevocably fixed by decisions of the Supreme Court, the instant they are made, in ordinary litigation between parties in personal actions, the people will have ceased to be their own rulers, having to that extent, practically resigned their government into the hands of that eminent tribunal. Nor is there in this view any assault upon the



court or the judges. It is a duty from which they may not shrink, to decide cases properly brought before them, and it is no fault of theirs if others seek to turn their decisions to political purposes.

\* \* \*

This country with its institutions, belongs to the people who inhabit it. Whenever they shall grow weary of the existing government, they can exercise their constitutional right of amending it, or their revolutionary right to dismember or overthrow it. I cannot be ignorant of the fact that many worthy and patriotic citizens are desirous of having the National Constitution amended. While I make no recommendation of amendments, I fully recognize the rightful authority of the people over the whole subject, to be exercised in either of the modes prescribed in the instrument itself; and I should, under existing circumstances, favor rather than oppose a fair opportunity being afforded the people to act upon it. I will venture to add that to me the convention mode seems preferable, in that it allows amendments to originate with the people themselves, instead of only permitting them to take or reject propositions originated by others not especially chosen for the purpose, and which might not be precisely such as they would wish to either accept or refuse. . . .

\* \* \*

Why should there not be a patient confidence in the ultimate justice of the people? Is there any better or equal hope in the world?

\* \* \*

. . . While the people retain their virtue and vigilance, no administration, by any extreme of wickedness or folly, can very seriously injure the government in the short space of four years.

\* \* \*

I am loath to close. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic cords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union when again

touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.

To which all American hearts may respond without compromising one principle of justice or natural right.

Finally, in Lincoln's Second Inaugural address, he expressed the following sentiments:

It may seem strange that any man should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing bread from the sweat of other men's faces.

\* \* \*

With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and orphans; to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.

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